



November 10, 2016

House Election Committee

Re: Term Limits Reform Hearing (HJR V, HJR W, HJR X)

Dear Committee members,

The Michigan Environmental Council (MEC) is a coalition of more than 70 member organizations across the state, strongly supports reforming or repealing term limits in the state of Michigan. We would like to thank Chair Lyons for bringing this issue forward, as this is an issue that has long been discussed around Lansing and deserves a full and in-depth look like this committee is doing today.

Michigan has the strictest term limit laws in the nation, only allowing legislators to serve a total of six years in the House and eight years in the Senate. Since term limits have been enacted, each election shows more clearly why reform or repeal is necessary. Every two years organizations like MEC and many others begin to run through education programs for new representatives on many complex issues. Just from our work you see the very complex policy decisions that are required to be made on energy, the drain code, nutrient run-off, air quality regulations, public lands and land use, and transportation funding. None of these issues are simple, and many times just as legislators understand all the complexities of these systems, they have to leave due to term limits. The cycle then starts over and all that experience is lost. In 2014 Michigan lost a combined 248 years of legislative experience due to term limits.

Even more troubling is the lack of time given to develop and exercise good leadership skills. Unfortunately, before a member can ascend to a leadership position within their caucus, they can be close to the end of their allotted time. Good leadership is critical to solving hard problems.

This mass loss of experience every two years leads to many issues being decided by those with little personal expertise in an issue and often with no relationships with those who are leading on the legislation. Forcing someone to leave a job just as they understand how to do it is not an effective system.

We believe that the approach taken by HJR V would be the most effective for the state, as repealing term limits outright is the best solution. We understand that there are many reasons that the repeal does not have a realistic shot at being enacted though. Short of that, we see HJR W as the second best option. MEC feels that somewhere between twelve and sixteen years between the two

chambers would be a good first step in reforming term limits. This will allow adequate time for someone to serve for a longer time in a single chamber and keep that institutional knowledge around for a more significant amount of time.

Hearing many of the arguments for term limits during testimony yesterday, we also see another solution to one of the main arguments: more competitive elections. This solution is reforming redistricting practices in the state. There are many good examples of independent redistricting commissions that have been implemented across the nation. Properly designed, these commissions allow district lines to be more efficiently designed to maximize competitive seats across the state.

The debate around term limits is no longer limited to those who consistently roam the halls of the Capitol. At a citizen event about a month ago, we were asked what a citizen can do about fixing term limits in the state. This issue should be a top priority as Michigan continues to work for a better government that serves all of its citizens effectively.

Thank you,



James Clift
Policy Director